

In re Application of:
Ellington, et al.

For: Expandable Coupling

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Examiner: Unknown

5 Oct 03  
Date

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Signature

  
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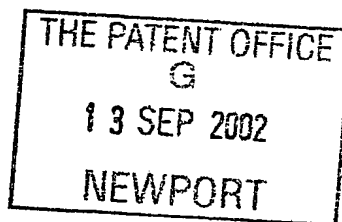




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14SEP02 E747984-2 D00239  
P01/7700 0.00-0221220.7

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WEATHERFORD/LAMB, INC.  
515 POST OAK BOULEVARD  
SUITE 600  
HOUSTON  
TX 77027  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

8028714001  
DELAWARE, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

4. Title of the invention

EXPANDING COUPLING

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)

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19 ROYAL EXCHANGE SQUARE  
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547002

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Claim(s) 7

Abstract

Drawing(s) 2 + 2 *fl.*

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Statement of inventorship and right to grant of a patent (*Patents Form 7/77*)

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Date

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12 SEPTEMBER 2002

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## EXPANDABLE COUPLING

## FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to coupling tubulars, and in particular to coupling expandable tubulars, most particularly expandable downhole tubulars.

## BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5           Downhole tubulars, such as bore-lining casing and liners, are typically coupled together by means of threaded connectors, or by providing adjacent ends of tubulars with male and female, or pin and box, threaded ends. For conventional applications, such coupling arrangements are  
10 generally satisfactory, providing secure, pressure tight connections. However, where strings of tubulars are to be expanded to describe a larger diameter, it has been found that the integrity of the coupling may be compromised.

          This is particularly the case where expansion is  
15 achieved using a rotary expansion tool. Such a tool expands the male or pin thread portion by cold working, reducing the wall thickness of the portion resulting in a corresponding increase in circumference and diameter of the portion, which tends to be accompanied by axial elongation  
20 of the threaded portion. However, the female or box thread portion is expanded by contact with the expanding male or

pin thread portion. This tends to induce axial contraction of the female thread portion. The applicant has found that in a conventional thread this differential expansion tends to produce an adverse effect on the thread integrity. In particular, it has been found that the axial contraction or shrinkage of the box portion is greater than the elongation of the pin portion, and causes the wall sections over the roots of the box portion to neck giving the outer surface of the box portion a rippled appearance. In extreme cases the differential expansion is sufficient to part the connection.

It is among objectives of embodiments of the present invention to provide coupling arrangements for tubulars which will retain mechanical and pressure integrity following expansion of the tubulars.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided an expandable tubular coupling including first and second thread portions each comprising a plurality of inter-engaging teeth, wherein at least one tooth on the first thread portion engages a corresponding tooth on the second threaded portion and the remainder of said inter-engaging teeth define respective gaps therebetween.

According to a second aspect of the present invention

there is provided an expandable coupling arrangement for first and second expandable tubulars, the coupling comprising:

5 a male thread portion on an end of a first tubular;  
and

a female thread portion on an end of a second tubular,  
the thread portions having flanks, roots and crests,  
wherein when the male and female thread portions are  
engaged, at least one flank of the male thread portion  
10 abuts a corresponding flank of the female thread portion,  
and the remaining corresponding flanks of the thread  
portions define gaps therebetween.

Thus, when the male and female thread portions are  
coupled together, engagement between the at least one flank  
15 of the male thread portion and the corresponding flank of  
the female thread portion provides a load point where, for  
example, the weight of one of the tubulars may be supported  
by the other tubular. Additionally, engagement between  
respective flanks of the thread portions may prevent the  
20 thread portions from rattling together when the first and  
second tubulars are coupled or screwed together, which may  
reduce any vibration or inadvertent loosening of the  
coupling. As used herein, any flank of the thread portions  
which provides a load point may be referred to as a load  
25 flank.

The invention has particular application in couplings

which are to subject to expansion by a rotary expansion tool.

Advantageously, once the thread portions are engaged and are subsequently expanded using a rotary expansion tool, the gaps between the corresponding flanks are closed due to differential expansion between the male and female thread portions. Thus, due to the presence of the gaps between the flanks before expansion is commenced, the female thread portion is free to axially contract, and the male portion is free to axially extend, without severe interference between abutting flanks causing severe necking across the thread roots, or even causing the coupling to separate. Once the gaps are closed and adjacent flanks are moved to close the gaps and to abut each other, additional load flanks are created, improving the thread engagement, and increasing the sealing integrity between the first and second tubulars.

Preferably, a plurality of flanks of the male thread portion abut corresponding flanks of the female thread portion, thus providing a number of load flanks in the unexpanded coupling. The number of load flanks may be selected as required, for example, in accordance with the weight to be supported by the coupling or the required torque to which the male and female thread portions are to be tightened. Additionally, the number of load flanks may be selected in accordance with the required expansion of

the thread portions.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the abutting flanks are provided at corresponding end portions of the first and second thread portions. Alternatively, abutting flanks are provided in the middle portions of the corresponding male and female thread portions.

Preferably, the gaps between corresponding flanks of the male and female thread portions are provided by employing a variable thread pitch in at least one of the male and female thread portions. The variable thread pitch may be provided on both thread portions and may be achieved by varying the width of the roots of the respective thread along the length thereof. Alternatively, or additionally, the width of the crests of the thread may be varied to provide a variable pitch.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the gaps between corresponding flanks of the male and female thread portions are provided in the central region of the thread portions. Alternatively, the gaps are provided in the end region of the thread portions.

In one embodiment of the present invention it is preferred that the abutting flanks of the thread portions are located in the middle region thereof, as noted above, and the gaps defined between corresponding flanks located in the region of the ends of the thread portions, on either side of the abutting flanks. This particular arrangement

is preferred as it provides improved stress and load distribution across the coupling and also optimally maintains sealing integrity once the coupling has been expanded. Additionally, providing the gaps between flanks on either side of the load flanks prior to expansion assists in maintaining the coupling after expansion as any tendency for the interference between the load flanks to cause the coupling to part during expansion will be retained locally, that is, in the middle region of the thread portions.

Conveniently, a deformable sealing material is provided in the gaps between corresponding flanks of the male and female thread portions, which sealing material may be energised when the gaps are closed during expansion of the coupling.

The material properties of the male and female thread portions may be selected to facilitate or improve the closure of the gaps between corresponding flanks during expansion.

Preferably, the thread portions define a thread which is cut in an opposite direction to the intended direction of rotary expansion of the coupling, such that any torque applied to or below the coupling by the rotating expander tool will tend to tighten the coupling.

The male and female thread portions may be of a dovetail thread profile. Alternatively, the thread portions

may be of a square, tapered or round thread profile. It should be noted, however, that the thread portions of the coupling arrangement of the present invention may be of any suitable profile as would readily be selected by a person of skill in the art.

The thread portions may be axially parallel, tapered or stepped.

Conveniently, the male thread portion is a pin connector and the female thread portion is a box connector.

Preferably, the first tubular has a leading end portion or nose adapted to be radially constrained by the second tubular. For example, the second tubular may define an undercut slot, recess or groove in which the nose is received. This prevents the nose from separating from the second tubular, and in particular from encroaching into the internal diameter of the coupling following expansion, as might otherwise occur due to end effects, where the free end or nose tends to radially contract more than adjacent portions of the tubular. Alternatively, or in addition, the groove may extend axially and be dimensioned to accommodate axial extension of the first tubular relative to the second tubular. The groove may accommodate a deformable sealing material, such as an elastomer, in particular an elastomer o-ring or the like which will be energised by relative axial extension of the male thread. In one embodiment, the free end of the first tubular member

is not threaded, to facilitate axial movement of the nose relative to the second tubular, and thus to energise, or further energise, the deformable seal, where provided. Preferably, the groove features a rounded recess angle, to prevent stress concentration and to alleviate stress-induced cracking upon extension.

Preferably, the first tubular comprises at least one sealing member for sealing engagement with an opposing surface of the second tubular, most preferably for sealing engagement with an opposing surface adjacent a free end of the second tubular. Conveniently, the sealing engagement is provided with a surface spaced sufficiently from the free end of the unexpanded second tubular to accommodate axial shrinkage of the tubular following expansion. The end effect of the expanded free end also serves to energise the sealing member. Most preferably, the sealing member is in the form of an elastomer. At least two axially spaced elastomers may be provided. The sealing members may be located in appropriate grooves in the first tubular.

According to a third aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of providing an expanded tubular coupling, said method comprising the steps of:

providing a first tubular including a male thread portion on an end thereof, and a second tubular including a female threaded portion on an end thereof, the thread portions having flanks, roots and crests;

engaging the male and female threaded portions to form a tubular coupling having a first diameter, wherein at least one flank of the male thread portion abuts a corresponding flank of the female thread portion, and the remaining corresponding flanks of the thread portions define gaps therebetween; and

expanding the tubular coupling to a larger second diameter using a rotary expansion tool, said rotary expansion tool causing the male thread portion to axially extend and the female thread portion to axially contract such that the gaps between the corresponding flanks are closed.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other aspects of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a sectional drawing of a tubular coupling in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is an enlarged view of a portion of the tubular coupling of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a sectional drawing of a tubular coupling in accordance with an alternative embodiment of the present invention; and

Figure 4 is an enlarged view of a portion of a tubular coupling of Figure 3.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Reference is first made to Figure 1 of the drawings in which there is shown a sectional view of a portion of a tubular threaded coupling 10 connecting the ends of first and second downhole tubulars 12, 14. The end of the first tubular 12 features a male threaded portion 16, or a pin connection, while the adjacent end of the second tubular 14 features a corresponding female threaded portion 18, or box connection. The threaded portions 16, 18 in this embodiment are tapered with respect to the longitudinal axis 11 of the coupled tubulars 12, 14. The threaded portions 16, 18 each comprise a plurality of inter-engaging teeth 20, 22, and as more clearly shown in Figure 2, the teeth 20, 22 of the threaded portions define flanks 24, roots 26 and crests 28.

In the embodiment shown in Figures 1 and 2 the thread teeth 20, 22 have a dovetail profile, that is, the flanks 24 of each tooth 20, 22 are inclined at an angle, that is non-perpendicular, relative to the adjacent roots 26 and crests 24.

Referring again to Figure 1, some of the flanks 24 of adjacent teeth 20, 22, where the leading end portion of the pin 16 engages the box 18, are in contact in order to provide a load point where, for example, the weight of one of the tubulars 12, 14 may be supported by the other tubular. The point of contact creates load flanks, which

are indicated in Figure 1 by reference numeral 30. In general, any flank 24 of the thread portions 16, 18 which provides a load point may be referred to as a load flank. The remainder of the teeth 20, 22 in the unexpanded coupling 10 are not in contact with each other and thus define gaps 32 therebetween.

By providing at least one load flank when the male and female thread portions 16, 18 are initially engaged assists in preventing the thread portions 16, 18 from rattling together, which may reduce any vibration or inadvertent loosening of the coupling, and also provides an initial seal between the tubulars 12, 14.

The gaps 32 between corresponding flanks 24 of the male and female thread portions 16, 18 are provided by employing a variable thread pitch in both the male and female thread portion 16, 18. In the embodiment shown, the pitch of the male thread portion 16 increases in a direction away from the nose 13 of the first tubular 12, and the pitch of the female thread 18 increases in a direction towards the nose 15 of the second tubular 14. The variable thread pitch is achieved by varying the width of the roots 26 and crests 28 along the length of the thread portions 16, 18.

The nose 13 of the first tubular 12 is radially constrained by the second tubular 14 by way of an undercut slot 11 or groove in which the nose 13 is received. This

prevents the nose 13 from separating from the second tubular 14, and in particular from encroaching into the internal diameter of the coupling 10 following expansion, as might otherwise occur due to end effects, where the free end or nose tends to radially contract more than adjacent portions of the tubular.

In use, the coupling 10 is made up on surface in the usual manner, that is the ends of the tubulars 12, 14 will be brought together and the first tubular 12 is then rotated relative to the second tubular 14 to make up the threads. In this manner a tubing string will be created, which may then be run into a bore. Once in position in the bore, a rotary expansion tool is run through the string in the direction of arrow A to expand the tubing string to a larger diameter. When the tool encounters a coupling 10, the male threaded portion 16 is expanded by cold working, reducing the wall thickness and resulting in a corresponding increase in the circumference and diameter of the portion, which tends to be accompanied by axial elongation of the male thread portion 16. However, the female thread portion 18 is expanded by contact with the expanding male thread portion 16, which tends to induce axial contraction of the female thread portion 18.

In a conventional thread profile such deformation tends to have an adverse affect on the integrity of the coupling due to severe interference between abutting flanks.

causing necking across the thread roots, or even causing the coupling to separate. However, in the illustrated coupling 10, the gaps 32 between corresponding flanks 24 are closed due to the differential expansion of the male and female thread portions 16, 18. Thus, due to the presence of the gaps 32, the female thread portion 18 is permitted to axially contract, and the male portion 16 is permitted to axially extend, without extreme interference forces being produced between adjacent flanks 24. Once the gaps 32 are closed by adjacent flanks 24 moving to abut each other, additional load flanks 30 are created, improving the thread engagement, and increasing the sealing integrity between the first and second tubulars 12, 14.

Reference is now made to Figure 3 in which there is shown a sectional drawing of a tubular coupling 110 in accordance with an alternative embodiment of the present invention. It should be noted that some features of this embodiment are similar to those described with reference to Figures 1 and 2, and in this regard like components share the same reference numerals, preceded by a "1".

In this embodiment the coupling 110 connects the ends of first and second downhole tubulars 112, 114. The end of the first tubular 112 comprises a male threaded portion 116, or a pin connection, while the adjacent end of the second tubular 114 features a corresponding female threaded portion 118, or a box connection. The male and female

threaded portions 116, 118 extend parallel to the longitudinal axis 111 of the coupled tubulars 112, 114. The threaded portions 116, 118 each comprise a plurality of inter-engaging teeth 120, 122, and as shown in Figure 4, the teeth 120, 122 of the threaded portions define flanks 124, roots 126 and crests 128.

In the embodiment shown in Figures 3 and 4 the teeth 120, 122 have a square or rectangular profile, that is, the flanks 124 of each tooth 120, 122 extend substantially perpendicular from the roots and crests 126, 128 of the teeth 120, 122.

Referring again primarily to Figure 3, some of the flanks 124 of adjacent teeth 120, 122 in the middle of the unexpanded threaded portions 116, 118 are in contact in order to provide a load point. The point of contact creates load flanks 130, and in general, any flank 124 of the thread portions 116, 118 which provides a load point may be referred to as a load flank. The remainder of the teeth 120, 122 of the unexpanded coupling 110 are not in contact with each other and thus define gaps 132 therebetween, which gaps 132 being located on either side of the section of the engaging thread portions 116, 118 which comprise the load flanks 130.

By providing at least one load flank when the male and female thread portions 116, 118 are engaged assists in preventing the thread portions 116, 118 from rattling

together, which may reduce any vibration or inadvertent loosening of the coupling, and also provides an initial seal between the tubulars 112, 114.

5 The gaps 132 between corresponding flanks 124 of the male and female thread portions 116, 118 are provided by employing a variable thread pitch in both the male and female thread portion 116, 118. In the embodiment shown, the pitch of the thread portions 116, 118 increase in a direction away from the centre portion of the threaded  
10 portions 116, 118, in the region of the load flanks 130.

Once the coupling 110 has been made up to produce a tubing string as required, the tubing string is run into a bore and a rotary expansion tool is then passed therethrough in the direction of arrow B. As noted above,  
15 the male and female thread portions 116, 118 deform in a different manner during rotary expansion such that differential expansion results, wherein the male threaded portion 116 will tend to axially extend and the female threaded portion 118 will tend to axially contract. The  
20 problems usually associated with such differential expansion are alleviated due to the presence of the gaps 132 between adjacent flanks 124, which gaps 132 allow the male threaded portion 116 to extend and the female threaded portion 118 to contract, minimising or preventing adverse  
25 interference between adjacent flanks 124. Upon rotary expansion, therefore, the gaps 132 are closed and adjacent

flanks 124 are brought into contact with each other in order to provide additional load flanks 130, improving the integrity of the coupling 110, both in terms of mechanical and fluid considerations.

5        It should be understood that the embodiments hereinbefore described are merely exemplary of the present invention, and that various modifications may be made thereto without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, the thread portions are not restricted to  
10    dovetail or square or rectangular profiles, but may include a rounded profile or any suitable combination of profiles. In general, any suitable thread profile may be utilised as would readily be selected by a person of skill in the art. Additionally, any number of load flanks may be provided  
15    before the coupling is subjected to expansion. Furthermore, in the embodiments shown, the load flanks are either located at the ends of the threaded portions or in the middle. However, it should be noted that the load flanks may be located in any suitable position, or  
20    combination of positions with respect to the threaded portions.

      The tubular coupling may include various sealing members located between the tubulars in order to improve the sealing integrity of the coupling, both before and  
25    after expansion. For example, a sealing member 40 may be provided in the gaps 32 of the unexpanded coupling 10, as

shown in Figure 1, wherein the sealing members are energised once the coupling 10 is expanded.

Additionally, the nose of each tubular member may be radially restrained in order to provide improved sealing and the like between the tubulars.

## CLAIMS

1. An expandable tubular coupling including first and second thread portions each comprising a plurality of inter-engaging teeth, wherein at least one tooth on the first thread portion engages a corresponding tooth on the second threaded portion and the remainder of said inter-engaging teeth define respective gaps therebetween.

2. An expandable coupling arrangement for first and second expandable tubulars, the coupling comprising:

a male thread portion on an end of a first tubular;  
and

a female thread portion on an end of a second tubular,  
the thread portions having flanks, roots and crests,  
wherein when the male and female thread portions are engaged, at least one flank of the male thread portion abuts a corresponding flank of the female thread portion, and the remaining corresponding flanks of the thread portions define gaps therebetween.

3. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in claim 2, wherein the arrangement is adapted for expansion by a rotary expansion tool.

4. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in claim 2 or 3, wherein the arrangement is adapted such that once the thread portions are engaged and are subsequently expanded using a rotary expansion tool, the gaps between the corresponding flanks are closed due to differential expansion between the male and female thread portions.

5. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in claim 2, 3 or 4, wherein the arrangement is adapted such that once the thread portions are engaged and are subsequently expanded using a rotary expansion tool the gaps are closed and adjacent flanks are moved to close the gaps and to abut each other.

6. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 5, wherein, a plurality of flanks of the male thread portion abut corresponding flanks of the female thread portion.

7. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 6, wherein the abutting flanks are provided at corresponding end regions of the first and second thread portions.

8. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 6, wherein the abutting flanks are

provided in a central region of the corresponding male and female thread portions.

9. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 8, wherein the gaps between corresponding flanks of the male and female thread portions are provided by employing a variable thread pitch in at least one of the male and female thread portions.

10. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in claim 9, wherein the variable thread pitch is provided on both thread portions.

11. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in claim 9 or 10, wherein the variable thread pitch is achieved by varying the width of the roots of the respective thread along the length thereof.

12. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in 9, 10 or 11, wherein the variable thread pitch is achieved by varying the width of the crests of the respective thread along the length thereof.

13. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 7 and 9 to 12 when not dependent on claim 8, wherein the gaps between corresponding flanks of

the male and female thread portions are provided in a central region of the threads.

14. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 12, wherein the gaps between  
5 corresponding flanks of the male and female thread portions are provided in an end region of the threads.

15. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 14, wherein a deformable sealing  
10 material is provided in the gaps between corresponding flanks of the male and female thread portions.

16. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in claim 15, wherein the deformable sealing material is adapted to be energised when the gaps are closed during expansion of  
15 the coupling.

17. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 16, wherein the material properties of the male and female thread portions are selected to  
20 facilitate or improve the closure of the gaps between corresponding flanks during expansion.

18. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 17, wherein the thread portions define

a thread which is cut in an opposite direction to the intended direction of rotary expansion of the coupling.

19. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 18, wherein the male and female thread portions are of a dove-tail thread profile.

20. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 18, wherein the male and female thread portions are of a square profile.

21. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 20, wherein the thread portions are axially parallel.

22. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 20, wherein the thread portions are tapered.

23. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 22, wherein the male thread portion is a pin connector.

24. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 23, wherein the female thread portion is a box connector.

25. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 24, wherein the first tubular has a leading end portion adapted to be radially constrained by the second tubular.

5 26. An expandable coupling arrangement as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 25, wherein the second tubular defines an undercut groove adapted to receive the leading end portion of the first tubular.

27. A method of providing an expanded tubular coupling,  
10 said method comprising the steps of:

providing a first tubular including a male thread portion on an end thereof and a second tubular including a female threaded portion on an end thereof, the thread portions having flanks, roots and crests;

15 engaging the male and female threaded portions to form a tubular coupling having a first diameter wherein at least one flank of the male thread portion abuts a corresponding flank of the female thread portion, and the remaining corresponding flanks of the thread portions define gaps therebetween; and

20

expanding the tubular coupling to a larger second diameter using a rotary expansion tool, said rotary expansion tool causing the male thread portion to axially extend and the female thread portion to axially contract

such that the gaps between the corresponding flanks are closed.

1/2

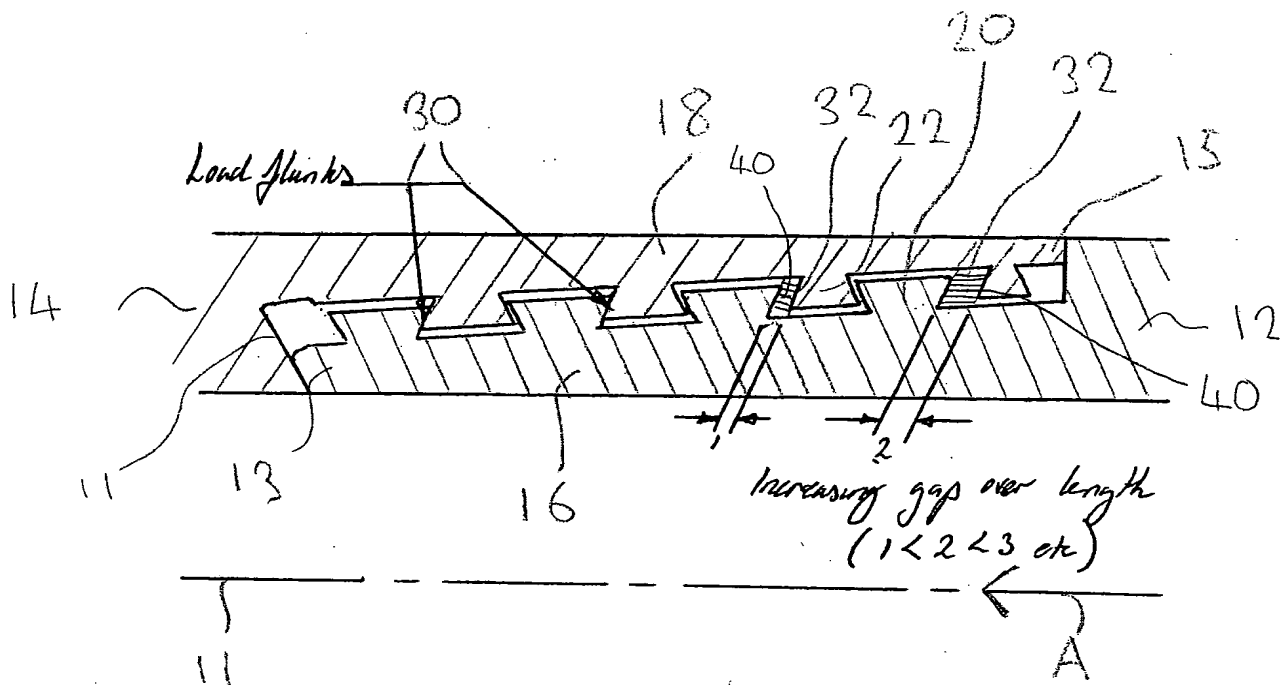


FIGURE 1

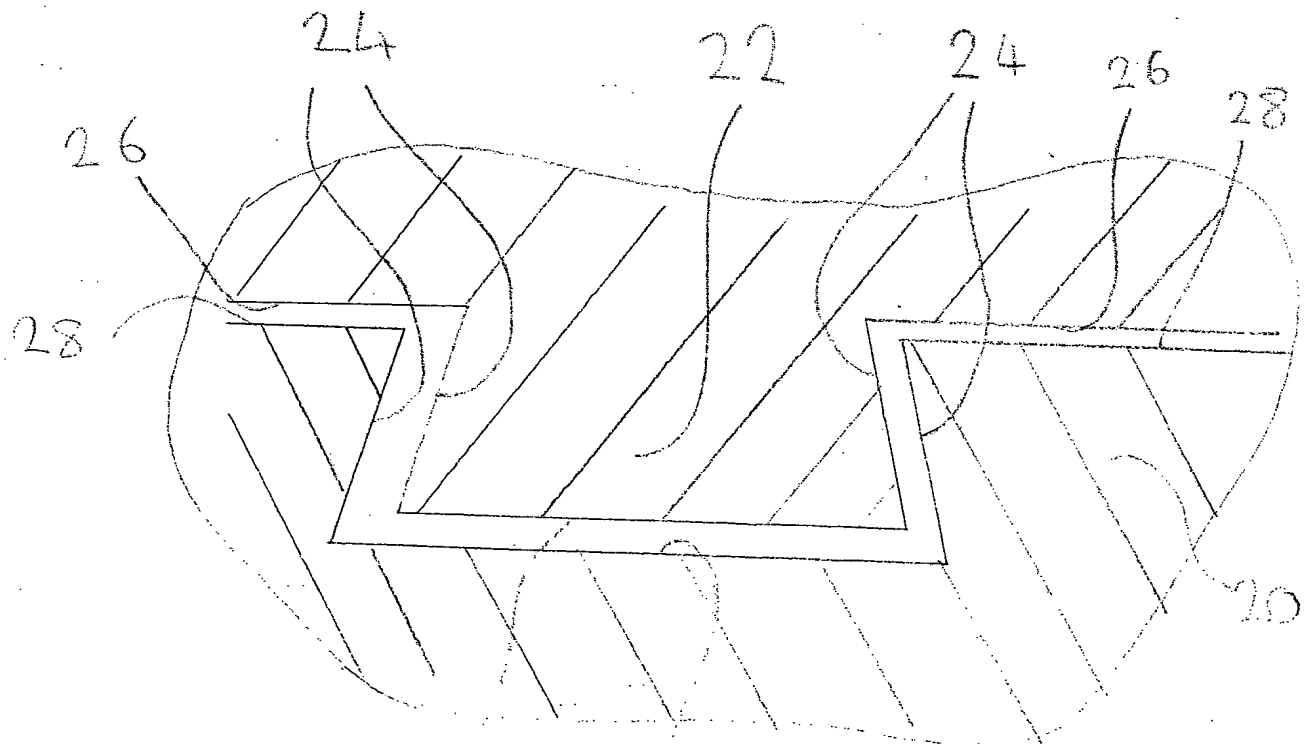


FIGURE 2



Disclosure 274

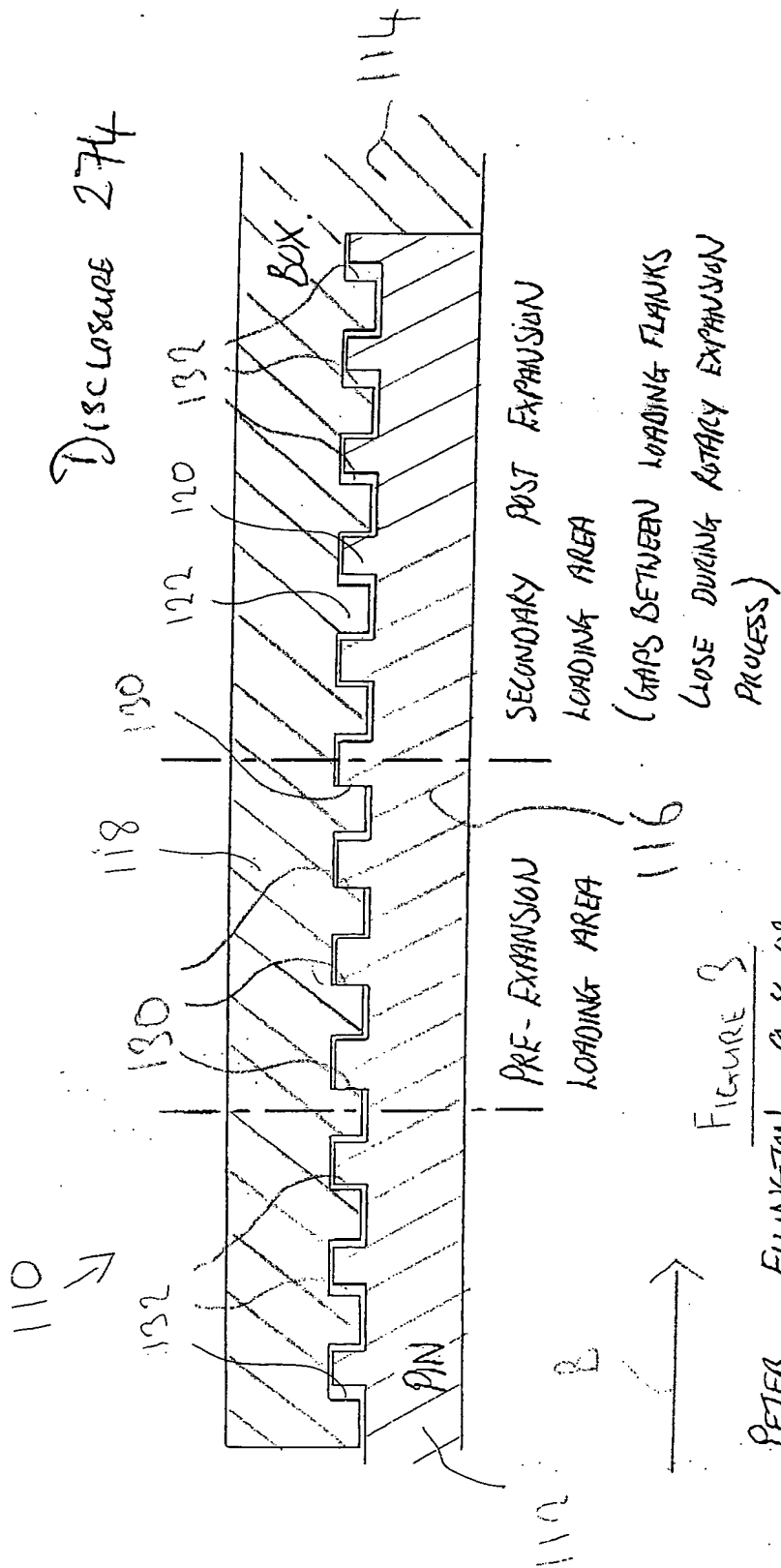


FIGURE 3

PETER ELLINGTON 9-8-02

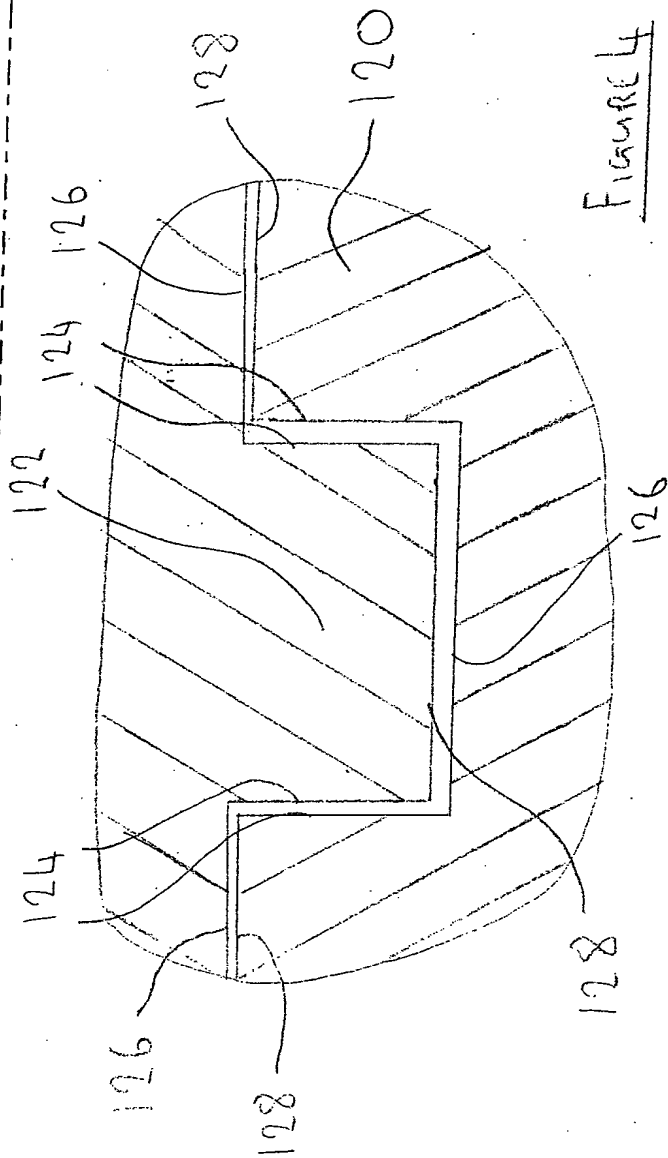


FIGURE 4

